

Chapter Twenty-One -- The Last Chord.

Ernest had come over to tie the knot, an' on Saturday night, when everything was ready, we got together around the piano in our parlor to sing.

Maybe the old time parlor wasn't supposed to be used much, but we had the piano in ours, an' it was the busiest room in the house a lot of the time.

We gave up nearly the whole evenin' to song, that night, singin' lots of songs from memory, an' draggin' out all our song books for old favorites.

Father's bass was still good, an' mine was better than usual, though I was always the weakest singer of the lot. Ernest an' Walter were singin' good tenor, an' when Mother came in from the kitchen, Shirley shifted over an' filled in on alto, though she was properly a soprano.

We sang

I stood on the bridge at midnight,
As the clock was striking the hour;
And the moon rose over the city
Behind the gray church tower....

to the tune Mother had made up. An' we sang the beautiful "Lorena",¹⁾ which I still can hardly sing without choking up, an' "Long, Long

Ago."

We sang hymns an' old-time ballads, an' when we got to the funny ones Father sang about how the:

Little ol' man come ridin' by,
 Say, ol' man, your horse will die.
 If he dies we'll have fresh meat;
 Give Johnny Booker the head an' feet.
 Do, Johnny Booker, oh do, dirmy do.
 Do, Johnny Booker, oh do.

Mother sang

I'm a poor, wayfarin' stranger,
 A-journeyin' through this world of woe.
 An' there's no sickness, toil nor danger,
 In that blost land to which I go.
 I'm goin' there to meet my mother;
 She said she'd meet me if I'd come.
 I'm only goin' over Jordan.
 I'm only goin' over home.

Owen didn't know many of the mountain hymns, so we sang him "The Sun-Bright Clime",⁾⁾ an' one or two others, an' then we got the books out again an' sang "The Son of God Goes Forth to War",⁾⁾ an' "How Tedious and Tasteless",⁾⁾ which is really a beautiful song, and then

Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blest,
 Beneath thy contemplation sink heart and voice oppressed.
 I know not, oh I know not, what joys await us there;

What radiancy of glory; what bliss beyond compare.

It was gettin' late, so before we went to bed that night we sang "God Be with You Till We Meet Again", for somewhere along our rocky road we had left off readin' the Ninety-first Psalm an' havin' prayer before a parting. I don't think any of us knew or realized when the custom was lost.

I'm sure none of us guessed that it was really goodbye, an' the final breakin' up of a singin' family. But before Shirley an' Owen came back from Virginia, Father had left for Kentucky, an' then Mother got very sick. An' time, an' distance and death intervened before we could ever all get back together again.

Years later we four children did get together once more, when Walter an' Kit were back from Brazil, an' Shirley an' Owen were refugees from Japan. We went through the motions, but the songs didn't seem the same, an' we could hardly sing for chokin' up.

We still sing in our own families, an' when two or three of us get together. But you can't go back to the past, can you?